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ABSTRACT

A model for evaluating a college second language writing instruction program is presented, based on experiences at the De La Salle University (Philippines) writing laboratory. The laboratory, a support unit of the university's language program, provides remedial instruction in composition and academic writing for referred students. The proposed evaluation model is longitudinal in design, and focuses on three program effects: (1) student cognitive gains, as measured by improvement in writing on essays; (2) student attitudes toward writing and toward the program itself, expectations of instruction, continuing motivation, and usefulness of materials and strategies learned; and (3) instructional delivery systems, through observation of teaching and monitoring of student portfolios. A pilot application of the model at the laboratory is described, although it is noted that its sampling is inadequate for use as an actual assessment. Appended materials include a writing pretest, three attitudinal scales, and the final (posttest) composition exercise. (MSE)

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ED 367 158

TOWARDS EVALUATING THE WRITING LABORATORY: A PROTOTYPE

Ma. Flor E. Mejorada,
Elvira Fonacier

INTRODUCTION

Writing has been a major concern of researchers, language teachers and materials writers. A body of research has been done on the teaching of writing as a process (Flower 1980; Jacobs 1982; Zamel 1982, 1983; Raimes 1983, 1985;) which led to formulating appropriate strategies of responding to students' compositions; and eventually setting up scoring or rating techniques (Heaton 1975; Perkins 1983; Jacobs 1981 in Hartfiel et al. 1985; Josephson 1989). However, no one had so far come up with an evaluation scheme that includes various components of a writing program with which students are taught.

This paper proposes a model which attempts at a composite evaluation of the writing program. As such, it includes the learner's attitudes towards writing and the program, the progress he attains at the lab, and the delivery system of the program.

The proposal focuses on evaluating the Writing Laboratory (WL) of De La Salle University (DLSU) in Manila, Philippines.

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A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

The Writing Laboratory of DLSU is a support unit of the Languages Department that accommodates students with writing problems. These students are recommended by their teachers for remediation. They take remedial classes for fifteen hours in the lab, spread over five weeks, meeting twice a week. They are taught by teachers who use the one-to-one conference-centered strategy. As there are only two to three students handled at one session the set-up makes immediate feedbacking possible. The WL's aims are to develop effective composing strategies and patterns of writing behaviour, to develop proofreading and editing skills and to facilitate the satisfactory writing and revision of academic papers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MODEL

While the model reflects our perceptions of the Writing Laboratory, we hope to provide a framework which can be applicable to other writing contexts beyond the WL of DLSU.

The model speculates that the evaluation is primarily intended to help the program staff composed of teachers who actually conduct the lab and the program coordinator to examine the effectiveness of the program and of its identifiable subcomponents. The results will necessarily make them rethink assumptions that underlie the activities conducted in the lab. Secondarily, the evaluation will inform the administrators of the status of the program so that they can lend support in terms of deciding alternative courses of action to make the program serve best its target clientele.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE MODEL

Viewed from the perspective of an on-going program delivery, the model covers three major components: affective evaluation, cognitive, and evaluation of delivery systems (Henning 1987). It is deemed that knowledge of the indexes of these three components could indicate the impact of the program on its users who are the students and its implementors who are the teachers as well as administrators.

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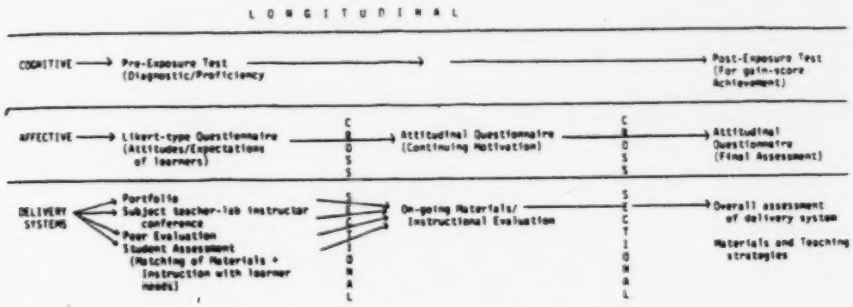
To facilitate the modelling scheme, this prototype takes only twenty students whose attitudes toward the program and whatever skills they shall have attained will be presented. However, the model will not go into statistical details of the results of the questionnaires and tests given to them. Since the sampling was not representative of all the classes from where the lab population came, the model is not going to present an actual evaluation of the lab's achievement. Besides, cutting up the limited sample and analyzing against various components would only lead to finding something "significant" just by chance, and the small numbers would likely yield unstable interpretations. Therefore, considering these limitations, the model will only give a general view of the program's impact on the users.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents of the study. Through a pretest/diagnostic test, and a week's observation of class performance the teacher determines the students with writing problems and recommends them to the lab. However, enrollment at the lab is voluntary. So the students who actually register are presumed to have some degree of motivation which those of similar category do not have.

FIGURE 1: THE MODEL FOR EVALUATING THE WRITING LABORATORY


L O N G I T U D I N A L
COGNITIVE
Pre-Exposure Test (Diagnostic/Proficiency
Post-Exposure Test (For gain-score Achievement)
AFFECTIVE
Likert-type Questionnaire (Attitudes/Expectations of learners)
CROSS-SECTIONAL
Attitudinal Questionnaire (Continuing Motivation)
Attitudinal Questionnaire (Final Assessment)
DELIVERY SYSTEMS
Portfolio
Subject teacher-lab instructor conference
Peer Evaluation
Student Assessment (Matching of Materials + Instruction with learner needs)
On-going Materials/ Instructional Evaluation
Overall assessment of delivery system
Materials and Teaching strategies

The Design. Figure 1 illustrates the evaluation scheme which is both longitudinal and cross-sectional. It is longitudinal because it assesses the major components from the beginning through the last day in the lab; it is cross-sectional because it examines these components after the fifth meeting, that is the mid-part of the program. Here, the student's individual progress is considered, not for purposes of computing his grades but for correlating his written products with his realizations of the lab after getting acquainted with the materials and the strategies with which his/her instructor carries out activities. Additionally, these current discoveries will be interpreted in relation to records that are available in the portfolio.

Affective evaluation is carried out by means of a Likert-type questionnaire administered to students three times. the first one is to elicit feedback about their attitudes toward writing and to the program, and their expectations in the lab. The second and the last questionnaires are to know about their continuing motivation, which materials they find useful and which strategies they think work out for them. While the program may effect some attitudinal changes, the evaluation does not aim at statistically measuring them. It assumes that any positive attitudinal changes the learners have will be generally reflected in their writing performance. Besides, it is not customary to expect radical attitude gains in a short period.

Cognitive evaluation is determined through a pre/post test comparison. On the first meeting the student is shown the paper he wrote in class. His strong points and his weaknesses revealed in his composition are analyzed. He is then assured that his weaknesses can be remediated if he works hard together with his/her lab instructor. On the last day, he is asked to do a post test designed to be of equal difficulty to the pretest and the same test is also taken by those recommended by the teacher to the lab but chose not to enroll.

The posttest scores of the program takers also serve as an index to whether the instructional objectives were met or not. Questions on the appropriacy, measurability and attainability of the aims of the Writing Lab will be proved or disproved by the same results.

Evaluation of delivery systems is done through a portfolio monitoring done by the teacher, teacher ratings by students, and observations by fellow teachers and the WL Director, and a bi-weekly subject teacher-lab instructor conference. The teacher writes notes or keeps anecdotal records on each of her students as the instruction progresses. These notes are available to other teachers for purposes of comparing experiences and sharing information that are of common concern. The students' assessment is taken from their answers to question on strategies and materials in the attitudinal questionnaire. Although teacher ratings by students "have offered problems in that they have been found to be more indicative of students' needs or desires than they are of teaching quality" (Henning 1987: 150), they are considered valuable in the lab to elicit reactions to the particular strategies not used in the regular classroom. Teacher observation done by the WL director is also of great value. The post observation conference is beneficial to both the teacher and the observer in terms of recognizing the program's strengths and scrutinizing problematic areas that call for new directions. Peer observation enables the instructor and fellow instructors to share with one another their on-going experiences with their respective students particularly on techniques and materials that have either proved successful or otherwise on certain writing problems of students.

Forty students with below 70% had similar ratings in the different components of the composition test they took on their first day in the regular English course.

Table 1: Pre Test Results of Students with Scores below 60%

Eng.Courses	N	Content	Organiz	Vocabry	LangUse	Mechnic	Total
ComArt31-Ex	3	17.00	14.00	14.33	16.00	3.67	65.00
ComArt31-Cg	5	15.60	14.00	14.40	15.00	3.60	62.60
ComArt41-Ex	6	15.67	15.50	14.67	15.33	3.83	65.00
ComArt41-Cg	4	16.00	15.25	15.25	14.50	4.00	65.00
EnglArt5-Ex	4	15.25	14.75	15.75	15.75	4.00	65.50
EnglArt5-Cg	4	15.50	16.50	15.50	14.50	4.25	66.25
EnComp12-Ex	5	16.60	16.20	15.00	15.40	3.80	67.00
EnComp12-Cg	3	14.33	15.00	16.67	16.67	4.33	67.00
EnComp14-Ex	2	15.00	16.00	17.00	16.50	4.00	68.50
EnComp14-Cg	4	14.50	15.00	16.00	15.25	4.00	64.75

AFFECTIVE EVALUATION

This evaluation considers the lab takers only. Since the focus is on what the program offers, the main aim for giving the questionnaire is to elicit feedback in order to give the maximum help to the students who have opted to be in the program.

IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL

RECOMMENDING STUDENTS TO THE LABORATORY

The regular classroom teachers, identified the students who needed the program. This was facilitated through the diagnostic test which they checked together with a lab instructor as interater. (Please see Appendix A, page 9, for a copy of the test). Moreover, the teachers' week-long observation of student performance in class would make them surer of who to recommend to the lab.

The scoring of the composition was based on Jacobs' ESL Composition Profile which includes the following components: Content (30%), Organization (20%), Vocabulary (20%), Language Use (25%) and Mechanics (5%). Because DLSU's passing cut-off score in the academic courses is 70%, those who got 69% and below on the diagnostic test were considered "failures" and therefore, needed the program.

Of the forty students recommended, twenty students actually took the course. They composed the experimental group (Ex) for the model. These students came from two sections of English for Computer Science (EnComp), section of English for Liberal Arts (EnglArt), and two sections of English for Commerce (ComArt2). The EnComp and EnglArt courses were under one teacher while the ComArt2 courses were handled by another. All of these English courses were basically writing with research along respective fields as focus. The rest of the poor writers, numbering twenty from the same classes, for whom the program should have been suitable opted not to take the program. These twenty students served as the control group (Cg). Table 1, p. 3 shows that.

On the first meeting with the lab instructor, the students answered a questionnaire (See Appendix B, .10). The answers indicated positive attitudes towards the program with majority claiming that the objectives of the lab were made known to them and that their coming to enroll was not because of any teacher pressure or classroom requirement. After the fifth meeting, these students had to answer another set of questions. This time the questionnaire was much longer since the purpose was to gain feedback about how the program was meeting the students' needs. (See Appendix C, pp. 12-13). On the last meeting, a questionnaire (Appendix D, p. 15) was answered again for final attitudinal assessment. Moreover, the results were expected to hint to the WL staff about what to keep, what to disregard and what to add to the program.

Table 2 below summarizes the results of the pre-laboratory, mid-laboratory and post-laboratory exposures survey of attitudes and continuing motivation of students. The means for the three surveys recorded values approximating 4.0 on the scale which could be interpreted as learners having positive attitude towards the program and having a rather stable degree of continuing motivation throughout the five-week lab period.

Table 2: Mean Scores on Attitude Survey

Score	Pre-Lab	Mid- Lab	Post-Lab	Mean Ave.
Mean	3.977	3.866	4.014	3.952

COGNITIVE EVALUATION

This component assessed the entry-level and exit-level performance of students (Please see Appendix E, p. 17 for the post test). Table 3 presents the post test results of WL students.

Table 3: Posttest Results of Students in the Writing Lab

Eng.Courses	N	Content	Organiz	Vocabry	LangUse	Mechnic	Total
ComArt31	3	21.67	16.00	15.67	21.33	4.33	79.00
ComArt41	6	18.33	16. 17	17.00	18.50	4.17	74.17
EngLart5	4	18.25	17.00	17.50	19.50	4.75	77.00
EnComp12	5	19.60	17.80	17.00	18.40	4.40	77.20
EnComp14	2	20.00	17.50	17.50	21.00	5.00	81.00

Figure 2, p. 6, presents a more detailed picture of students' writing skills noting their improvement in various components of the composition. Content (3.5 gain score) and Language use (3.7) recorded the first two highest gain scores. On the other hand, the scores of the Control group on the same components were much lower. Content recorded a 1.08 gain score and Language Use, 1.1.

Comparing the overall scores of the two groups, the lab takers registered a higher degree of improvement over those who did not take WL lessons. Figure 3, p.7 presents the picture of both the experimental and the control group on their pre/post performance with their respective gain scores. With the mean pretest scores obviously registering no significant difference between the two groups, the experimental group's posttest scores, which are higher than those of the non-lab takers (76.82 overall posttest score with a gain of 10.55 for the Ex group, and 69.58, with a gain of 4.23 for the C group), may permit the conclusion that their gain score can be attributed to their participation in the program. Of course, this does not discount the possibility that there might have been initial differences between the two groups which could not be identified, and that these differences could have accounted for some of the posttest differences.

FIGURE 2: PRE/POST TEST RESULTS

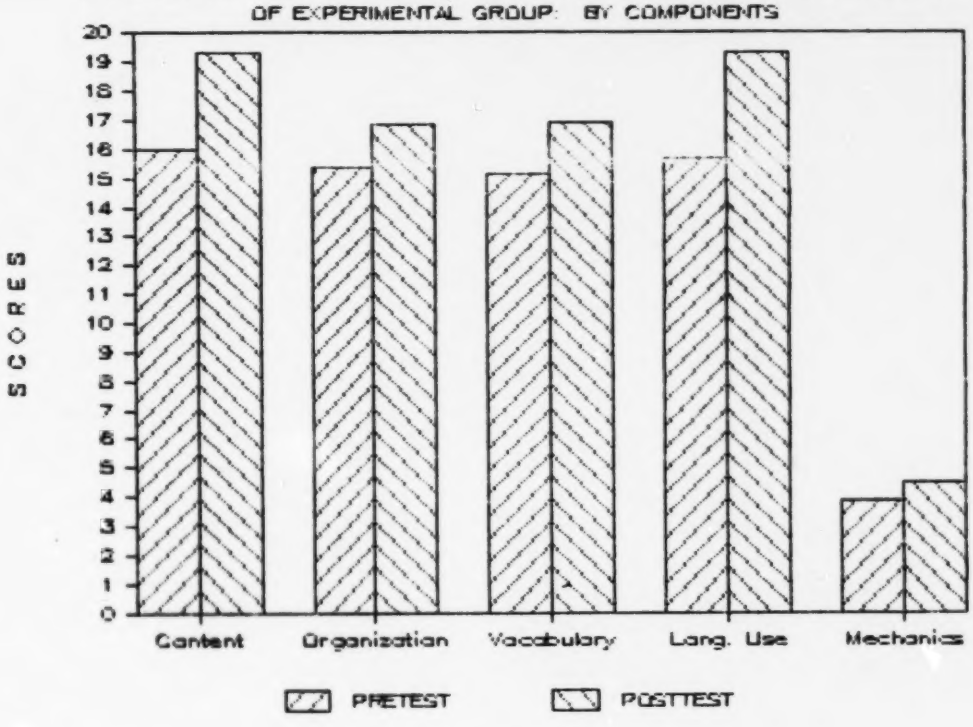
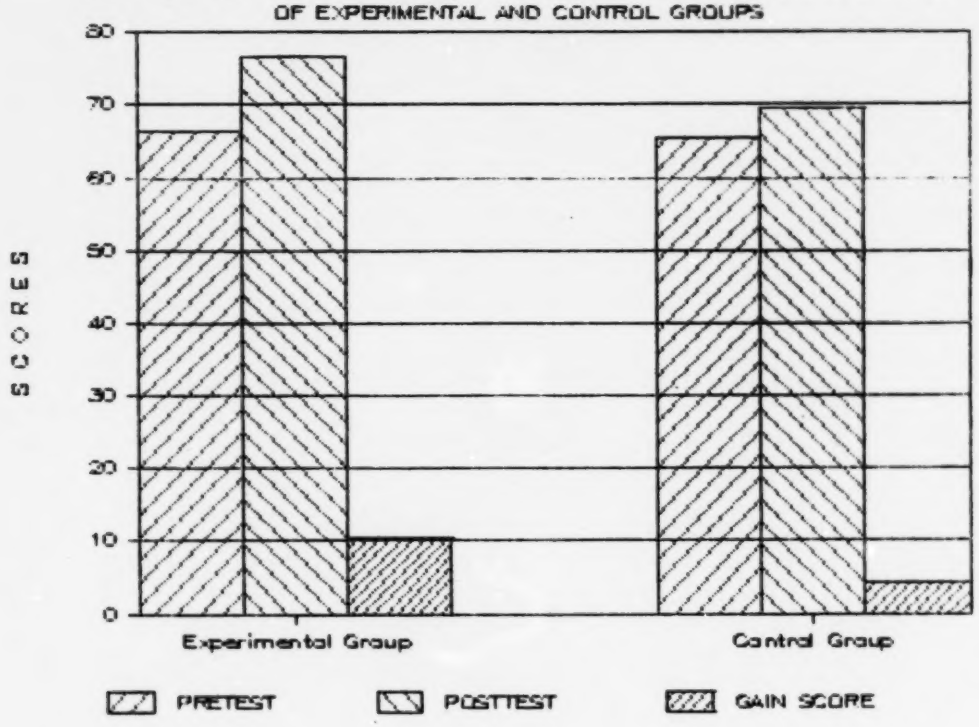


FIGURE 3: PRE/POST TEST RESULTS

OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS



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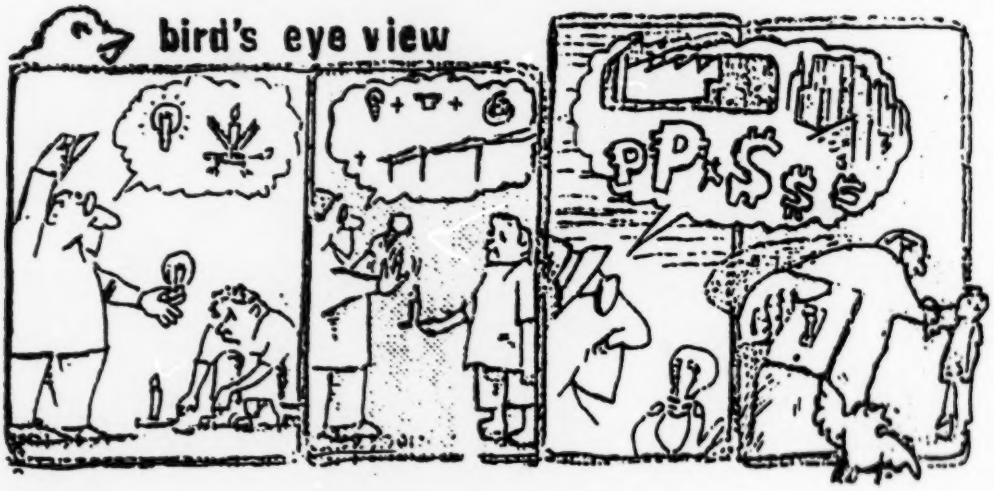
Raimes, A. 1985. 'What unskilled ESL students do as they write: a classroom study of composing'. TESOL Quarterly. 19: 229-58.

Zamel, Vivian. 1983. The composing processes of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. TESOL Quarterly 17 (2). 165-187.

APPENDIX A

Pre-Test

Direction: **Study the picture below, and then write an essay of at least three paragraphs developing the topic, "The Fate of the Filipino Scientists Today" for the feature section of Bulletin Today (Daily newspaper).**



APPENDIX B

Writing Laboratory Attitudinal Scale A

Instructions: Answer the following questions by shading the circle that corresponds to your answer in the sheet. The answer sheet has the following scale: 5 (Strongly Agree); 4 (Agree); 3 (Neutral); 2 (Disagree); and 1 (Strongly Disagree).

1 I expect to develop my writing skills in the laboratory.

2 The objectives of the program have been made clear to me.

3 I expect to identify my writing weaknesses.

4 I will attend the lab session regularly.

5 I am open to criticism regarding my writing.

6 I will make use of the lab resources to my advantage.

7 My going to the lab is of my own initiative.

8 I attend the lab to fulfill a requirement.

9 I enrolled in the lab because of teacher-pressure.

10 I do not feel comfortable with my writing.

APPENDIX B (Cont'd)

Teacher : _____ Section: _____

Form A

	5	4	3	2	1
1.	0	0	0	0	0
2.	0	0	0	0	0
3.	0	0	0	0	0
4.	0	0	0	0	0
5.	0	0	0	0	0
6.	0	0	0	0	0
7.	0	0	0	0	0
8.	0	0	0	0	0
9.	0	0	0	0	0
10.	0	0	0	0	0

27 I am not able to develop my writing skills despite the program offerings.

28 My instructor does not provide enough feedback to allow me to see my progress.

29 The lab program needs further development.

30 I fell that I am getting poor quality instruction in the lab.

31 My writing has remained the same as when I started in the lab.

32 I don't feel that the lab is able to address my writing problems.

33 I always feel threatened everytime my instructor comments on my composition.

34 My morale has been very low since I attended the lab sessions.

35 I feel at ease working in the lab.

36 I feel at ease conferring with my instructor in the lab.

37 I am bored with the way my instructor conducts the sessions most of the time.

38 The lessons are repetitive of those I have in my English course.

39 The lessons in the lab complement those in my English course.

APPENDIX C (Cont'd)

Teacher: _____ Section: _____

Form B

	5	4	3	2	1		5	4	3	2	1
1.	0	0	0	0	0	21.	0	0	0	0	0
2.	0	0	0	0	0	22.	0	0	0	0	0
3.	0	0	0	0	0	23.	0	0	0	0	0
4.	0	0	0	0	0	24.	0	0	0	0	0
5.	0	0	0	0	0	25.	0	0	0	0	0
6.	0	0	0	0	0	26.	0	0	0	0	0
7.	0	0	0	0	0	27.	0	0	0	0	0
8.	0	0	0	0	0	28.	0	0	0	0	0
9.	0	0	0	0	0	29.	0	0	0	0	0
10.	0	0	0	0	0	30.	0	0	0	0	0
11.	0	0	0	0	0	31.	0	0	0	0	0
12.	0	0	0	0	0	32.	0	0	0	0	0
13.	0	0	0	0	0	33.	0	0	0	0	0
14.	0	0	0	0	0	34.	0	0	0	0	0
15.	0	0	0	0	0	35.	0	0	0	0	0
16.	0	0	0	0	0	36.	0	0	0	0	0
17.	0	0	0	0	0	37.	0	0	0	0	0
18.	0	0	0	0	0	38.	0	0	0	0	0
19.	0	0	0	0	0	39.	0	0	0	0	0
20.	0	0	0	0	0						

APPENDIX D

Writing Laboratory Attitudinal Scale C

Instructions: Answer the following questions by shading the circle that corresponds to your answer in the answer sheet. The answer sheet has the following scale: 5 (Strongly Agree); 4 (Agree); 3 (Neutral); 2 (Disagree); and 1 (Strongly Disagree).

1 With the program, I can now write a well-organized composition.

2 I feel that I wasted my money in the lab.

3 The materials to work on were those that I did not need.

4 The lab program is an unnecessary support of the English course.

5 I am confident of what I am doing in the lab most of the time.

6 I feel that I am not using my time well in the lab.

7 Until now, I could not write a composition that meets the standard of my instructor.

8 My instructor has been very supportive throughout the program.

9 I feel I have accomplished very little in the lab.

10 The lab sessions have been productive.

APPENDIX D (Cont'd)

Teacher: _____ Section: _____

Form C

	5	4	3	2	1
1.	0	0	0	0	0
2.	0	0	0	0	0
3.	0	0	0	0	0
4.	0	0	0	0	0
5.	0	0	0	0	0
6.	0	0	0	0	0
7.	0	0	0	0	0
8.	0	0	0	0	0
9.	0	0	0	0	0
10.	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX E

Final Composition

Direction: A local newspaper is inviting you to write an editorial for its next issue. Based on the picture below, write an essay of at least three paragraphs answering the question, "What Makes an Employee Unproductive?"